



Humanizing Difference: Teaching World Religions in Middle School

Tommy Sharp, Holland Hall School, Tulsa, OK

NCSS Annual Conference, Boston, MA

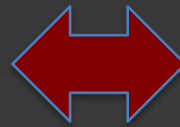
November 22, 2014

Plan For Today

- Part 1: The Case for Teaching World Religions in Middle School
- Part 2: What We Should Teach, and How
- Part 3: Troubleshooting

Part 1: The Case for Teaching World Religions in Middle School

Middle School
Students' Lived
Realities



Context of
Interconnected
Pluralistic
Religiously
Diverse Society

Both demand that we prioritize religious understanding as a **basic civic competency**.

Middle School
Students' Lived
Realities

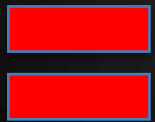
Social and Emotional Realities of Middle School Students

- **Where do I fit in?**
 - Emphasis on Conformity, Spotlight Phenomenon
- **Differences are “weird”**
 - Stereotypes, Fear of “The Other,” Entrenching Prejudices
- **Developing abstract cognitive abilities**
 - Building a worldview

Rejection of
Differences as
“weird”



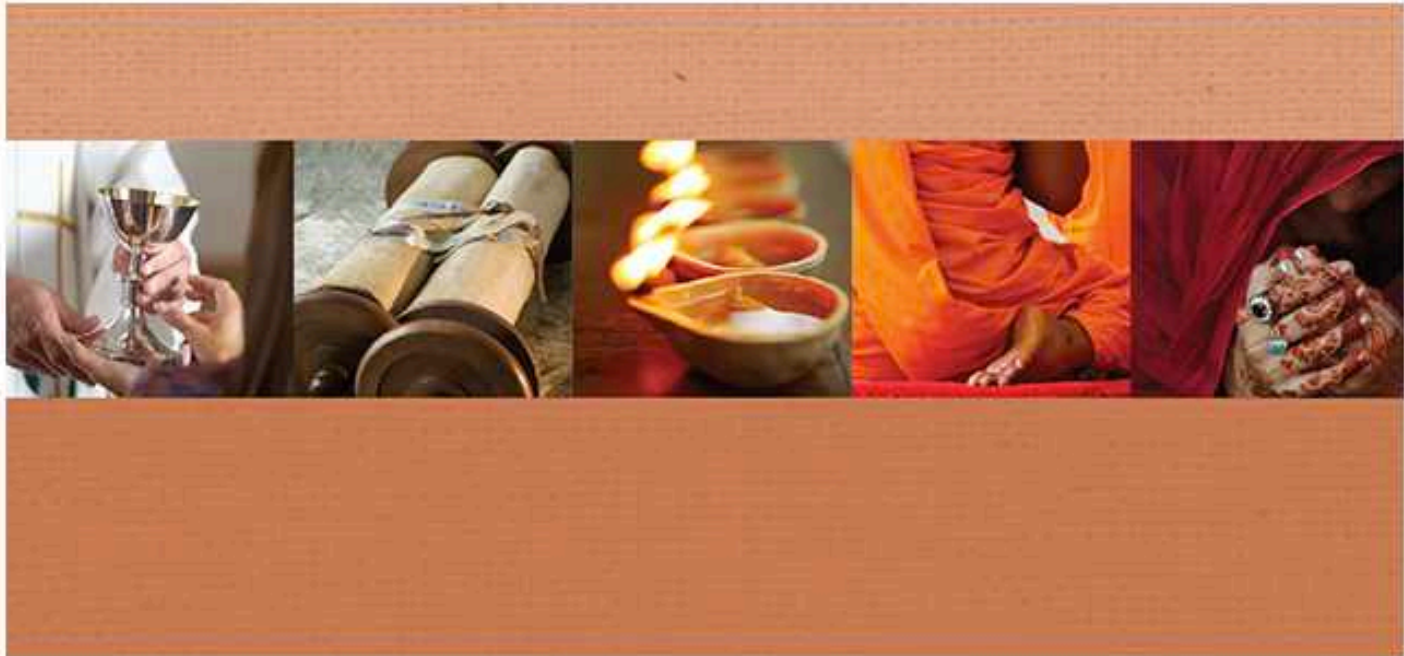
Lack of information or
mostly negative
information about
world’s faith traditions



Dangerous atmosphere of
misunderstanding, stereotypes, and
fear surrounding religious differences

**Religious Ignorance and Intolerance
Have Dangerous, Often Tragic Effects
for Society...**

Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High



The share of countries with a high or very high level of **social hostilities involving religion** reached a six-year peak in 2012, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center. A third (33%) of the 198 countries and territories included in the study had high religious hostilities in 2012,

Restrictions on Religion, by Year

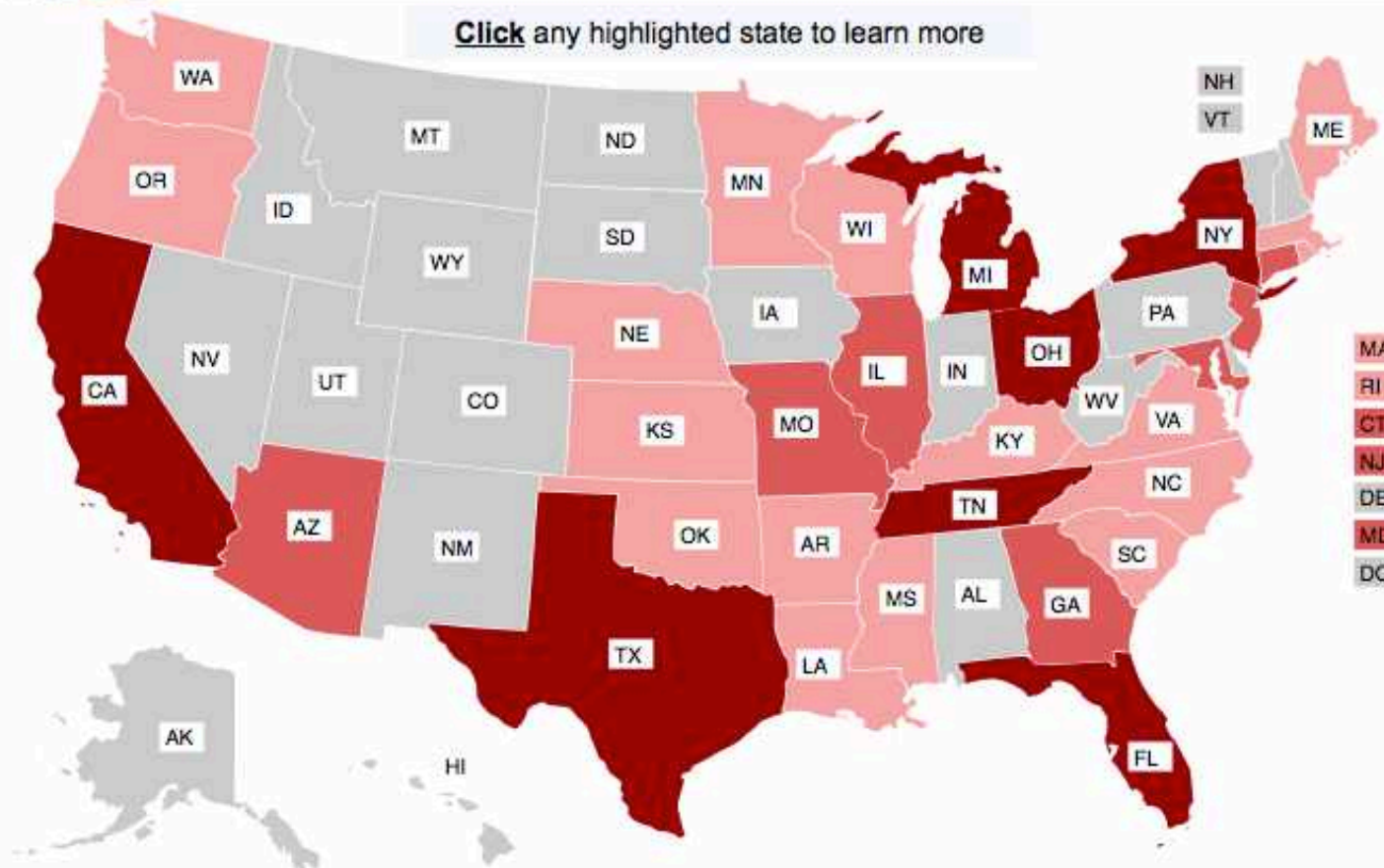
High or very high levels of restrictions

% of countries % of global

Map - Nationwide Anti-Mosque Activity



Click any highlighted state to learn more



- 1 or 2 anti-mosque incidents
- 3 or 4 anti-mosque incidents
- 3 or 4 anti-mosque incidents



<https://www.aclu.org/maps/map-nationwide-anti-mosque-activity>

Sikhs repair, reclaim temple after rampage

From Ted Rowlands, CNN
updated 10:38 AM EDT, Fri August 10, 2012



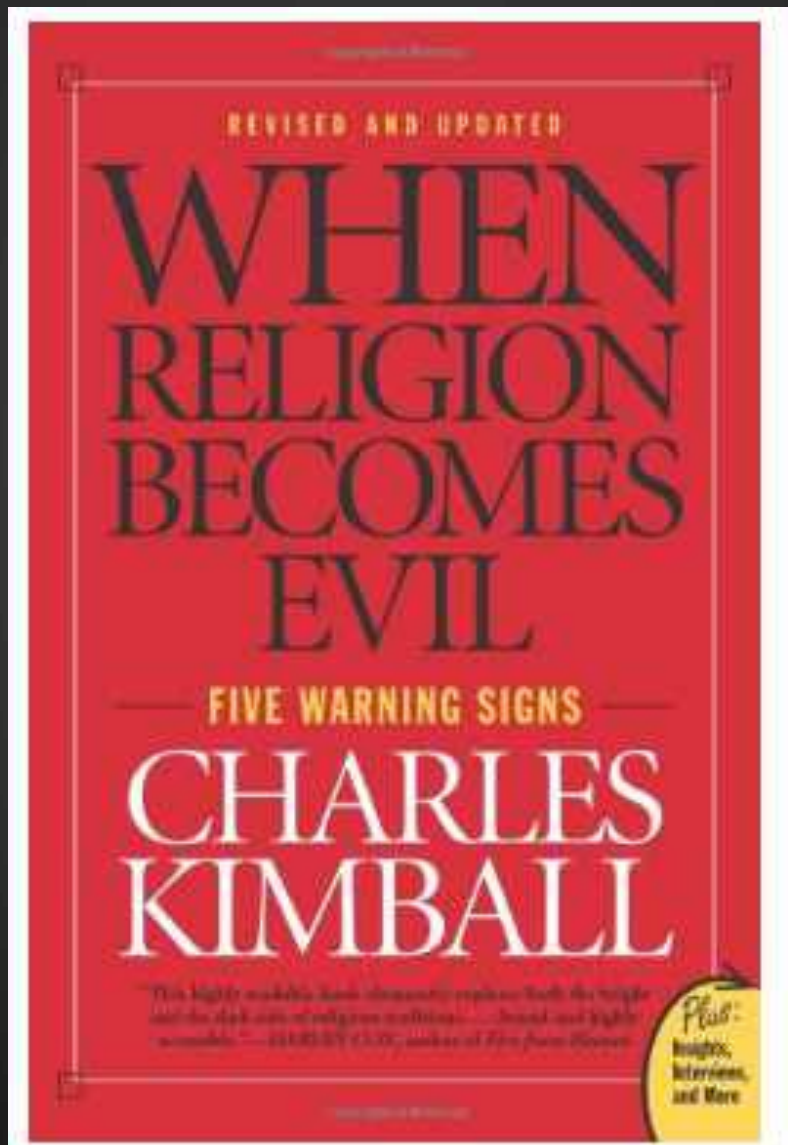
Photos of the victims are displayed during a candlelight vigil Wednesday in New York's Union Square. Six people were killed in the shooting Sunday, August 5, near Milwaukee.

HIDE CAPTION

Shooting at Sikh temple in Wisconsin

<http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/09/justice/wisconsin-temple-shooting/index.html>

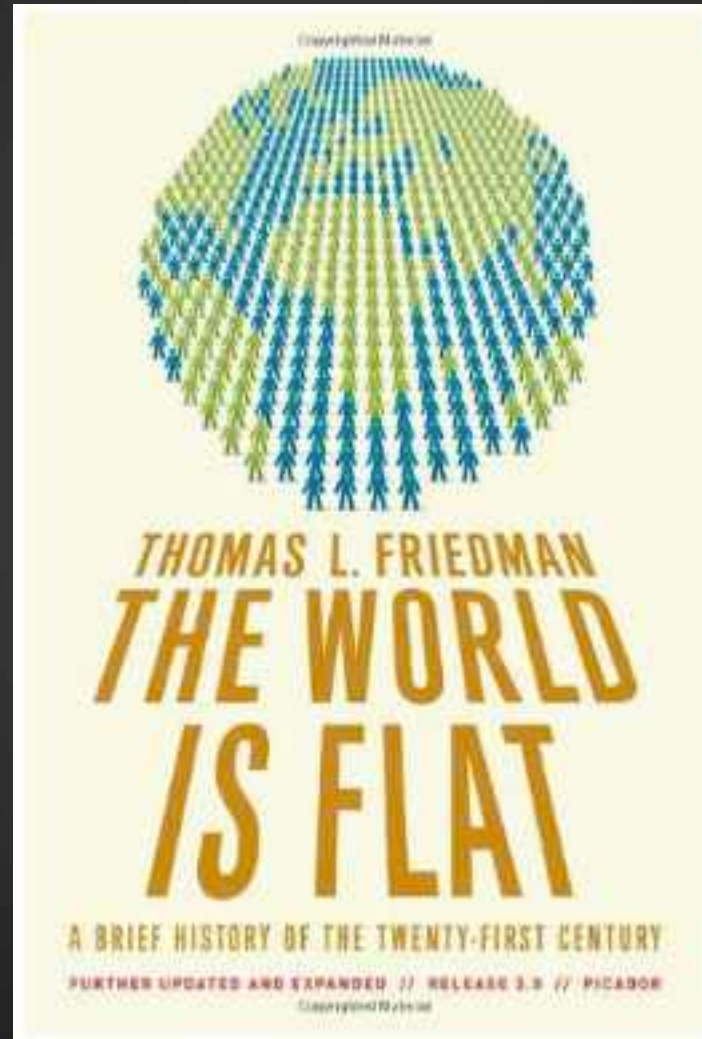
Side note: Helpful Resource...



Religious extremism is a result of people not learning to respect religious differences at a young age.

Context of
Interconnected
Pluralistic
Religiously
Diverse Society

The Context of Today's World

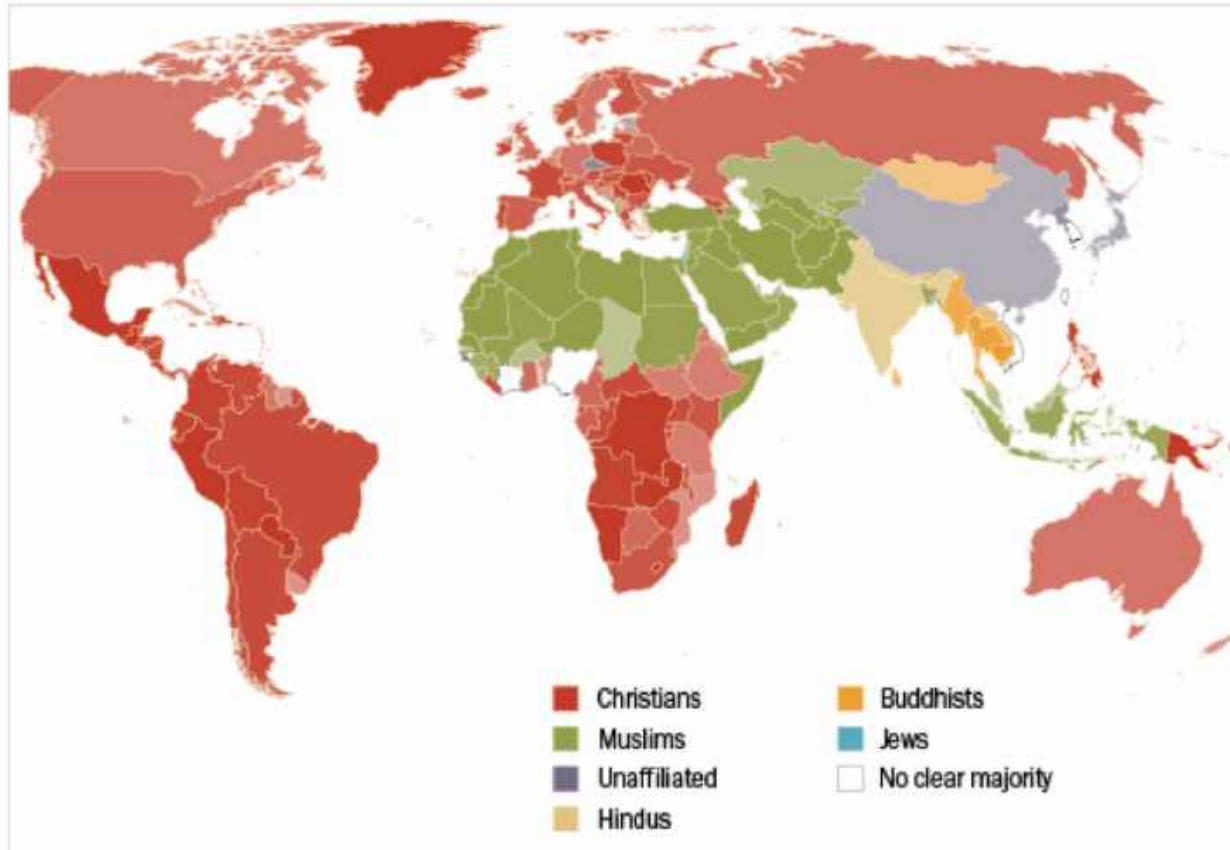


Snapshot of Today's Religious World from
Pew Research Center's
"Global Religious Landscape"
(published Dec. 2012)

Traditional Map of World Religions

Majority Religion, by Country

Countries are colored according to the majority religion. Darker shading represents a greater prevalence of the majority religion.



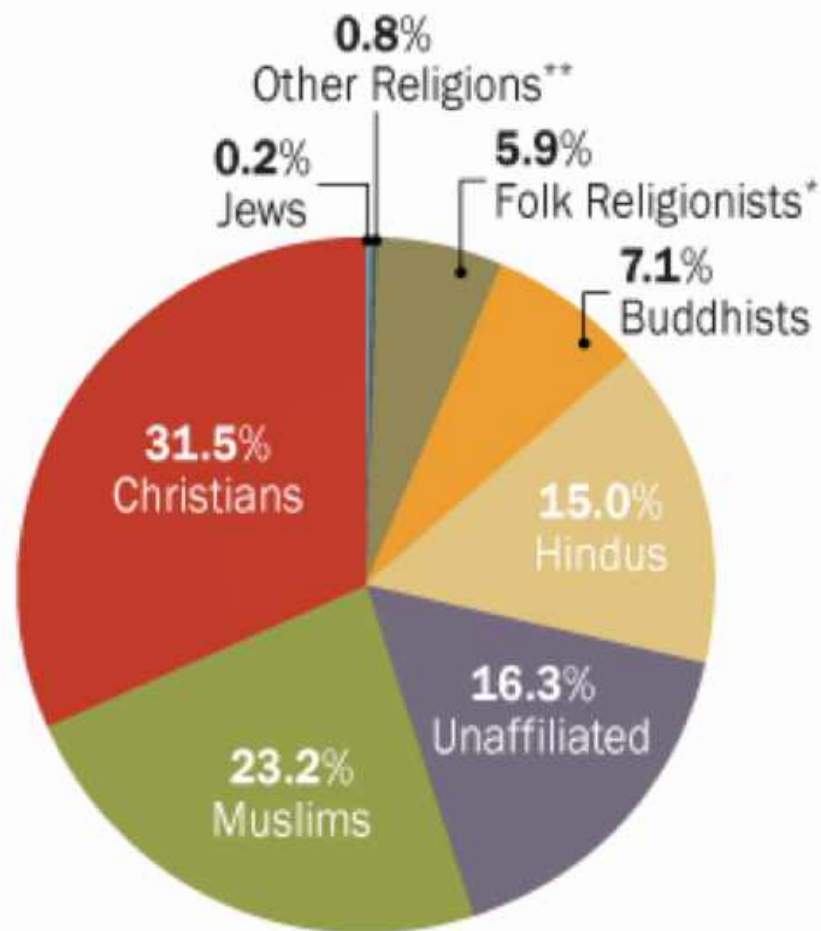
Nine countries have no clear religious majority: Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Macau, Nigeria, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Togo and Vietnam. There are no countries in which adherents of folk religions make up a clear majority. There are also no countries in which followers of other religions (such as Bahai's, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans or Zoroastrians) make up a clear majority.

Misconception Alert

- Help students grasp the “color by numbers” traditional map obscures the reality of religious diversity!
- Example: A majority Christian population does not constitute a “Christian Country”

Size of Major Religious Groups, 2010

Percentage of the global population



*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.

**Includes Bahai's, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other faiths.

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life •
Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

A More Accurate Picture...

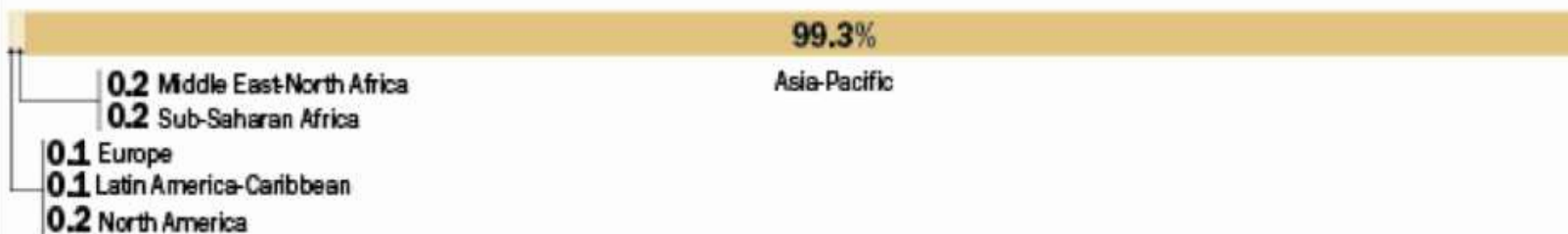
(better than traditional map,
still work to do in unpacking religious diversity)

Regional Distribution of Hindus

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world Hindu population in each region as of 2010



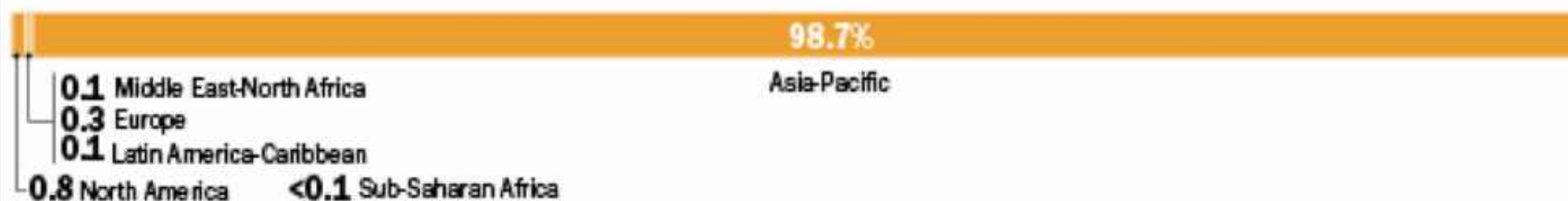
Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Regional Distribution of Buddhists

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world Buddhist population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

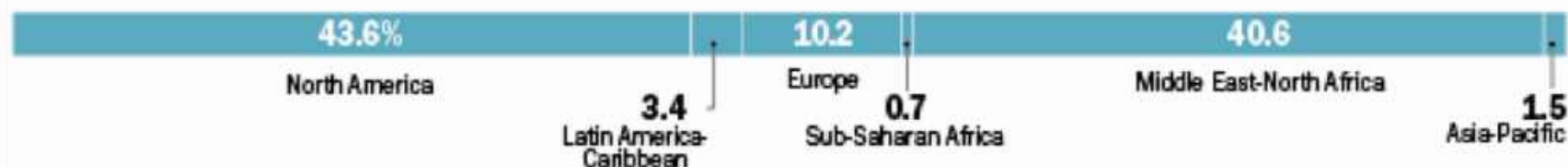
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Regional Distribution of Jews

Population by region as of 2010



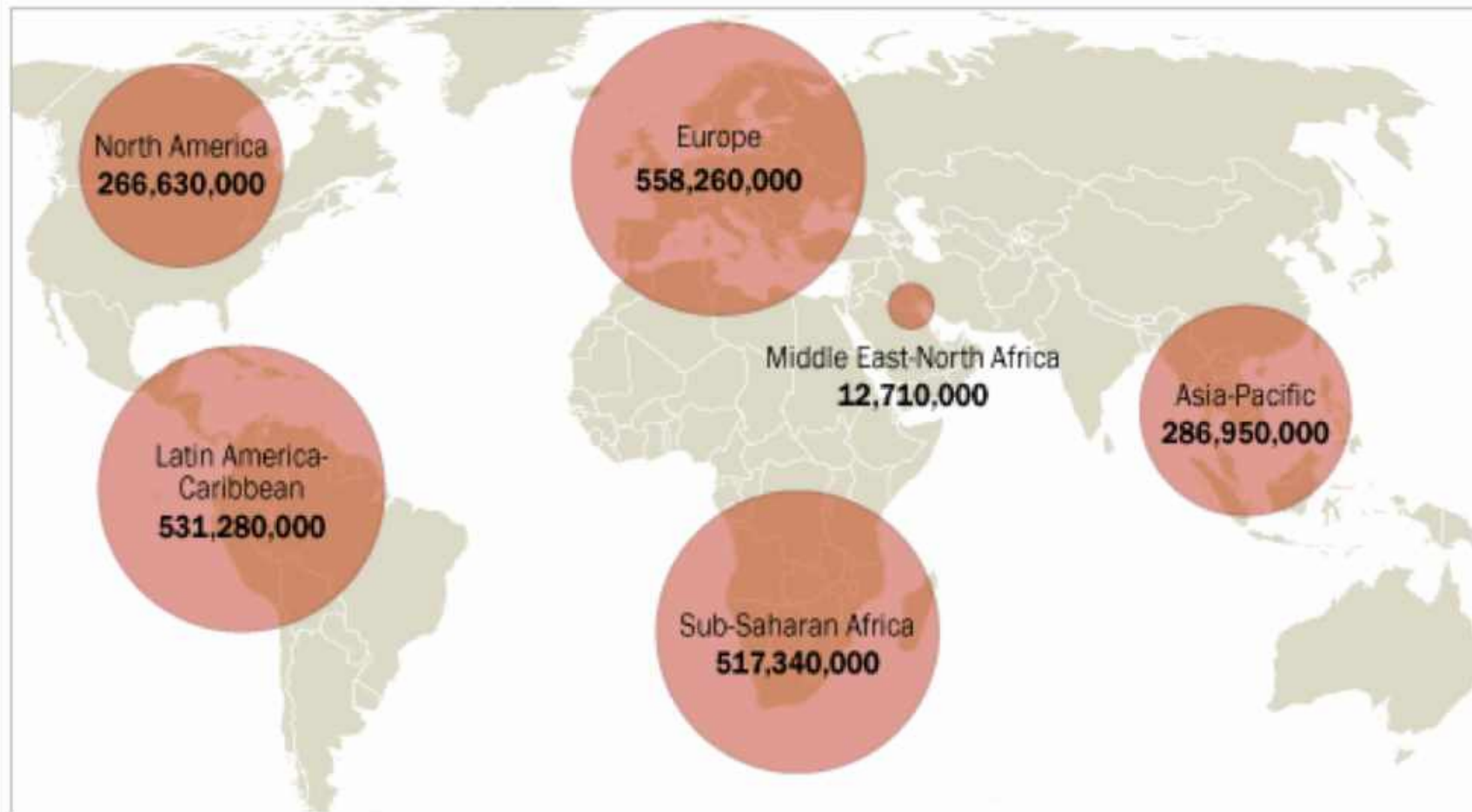
Percentage of world Jewish population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Few Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Regional Distribution of Christians

Population by region as of 2010



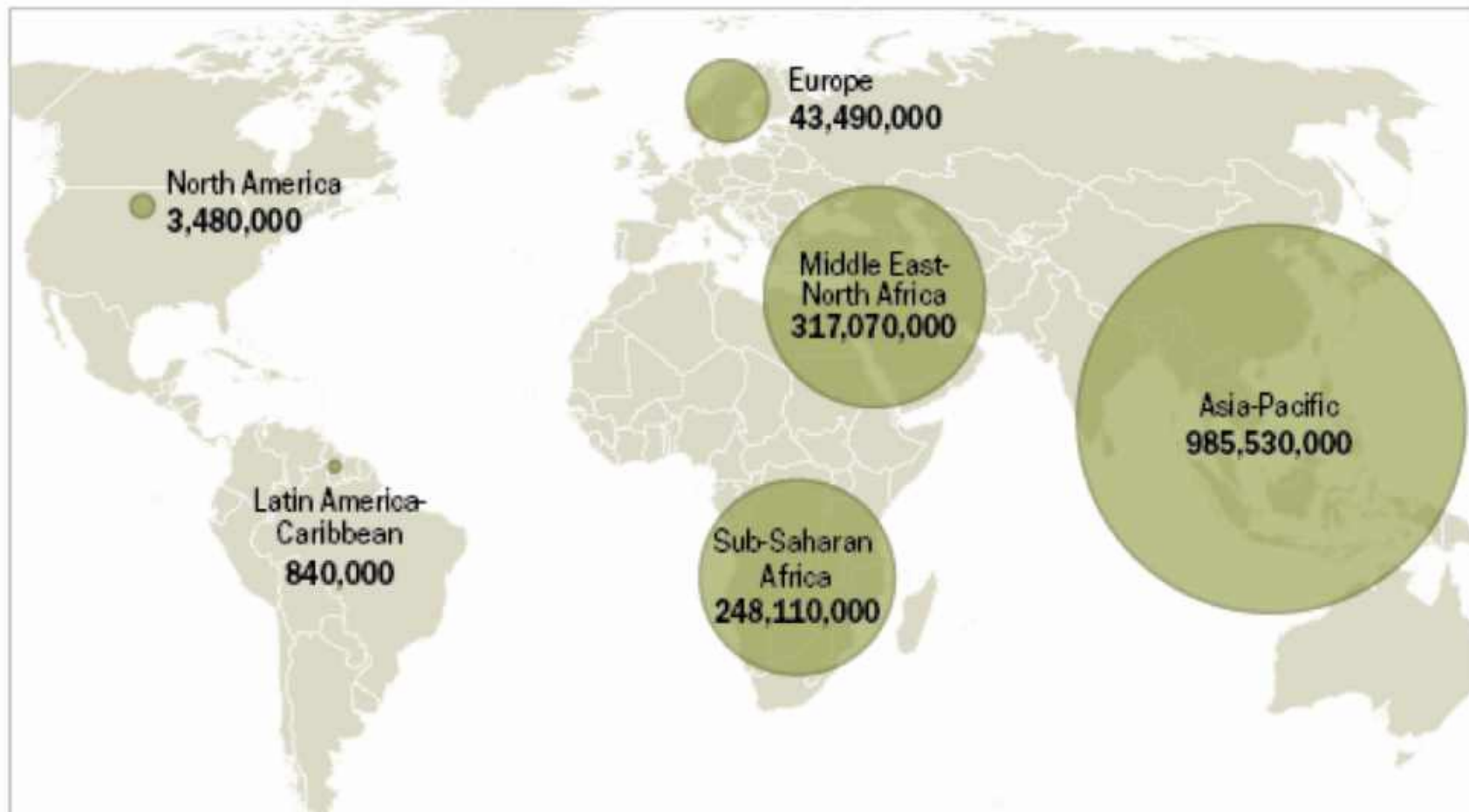
Percentage of world Christian population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Regional Distribution of Muslims

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world Muslim population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Regional Distribution of the Unaffiliated

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world unaffiliated population in each region as of 2010



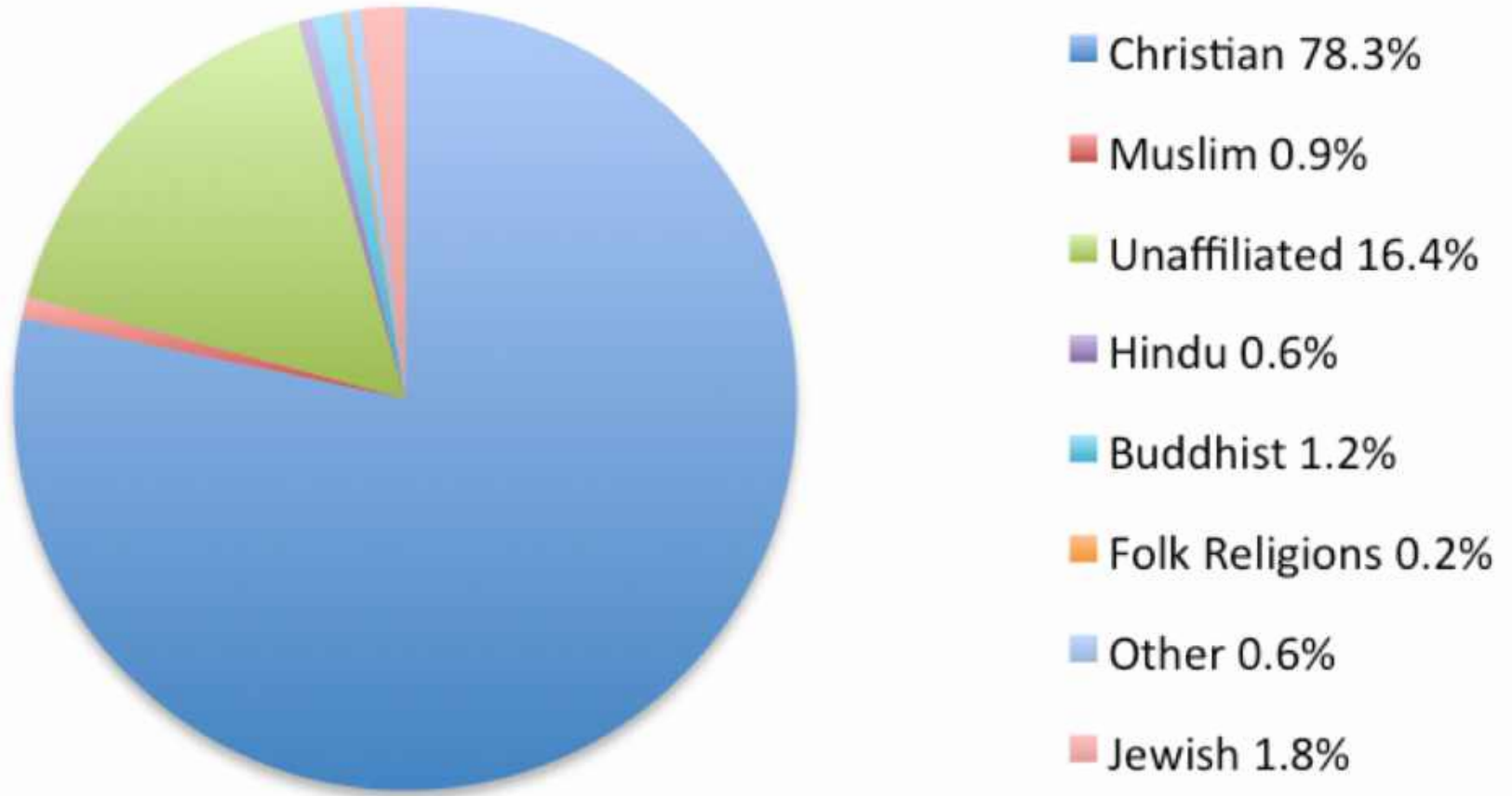
Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Few Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

The immediate context (U.S.) does not
look the same as the global context.

(Even less so regionally or locally)

% of U.S. Population in 2010



Source: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Global Religious Landscape*, December 2012

About **95%** of religiously affiliated people in the U.S. are Christian.

U.S. does not mirror the world

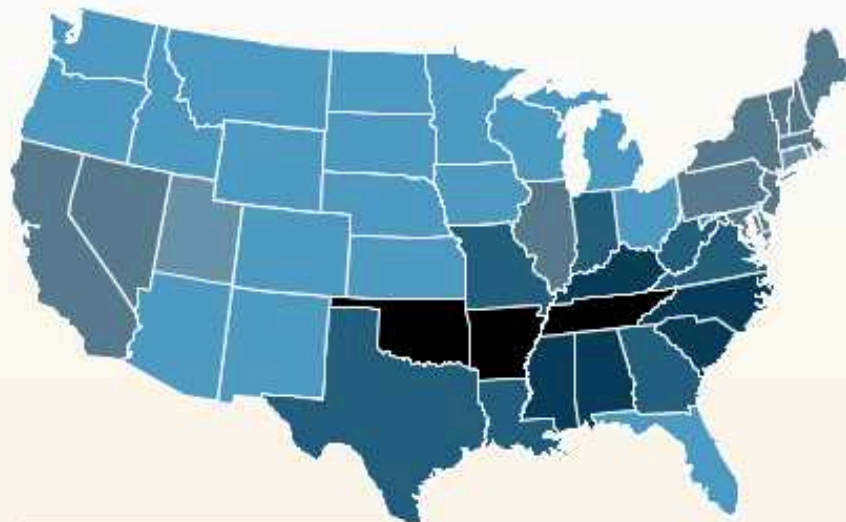
Religion	World	U.S.	Difference
Christianity	31.5%	78.3%	+46.8%
Islam	23.2%	0.9%	-22.3%
Hinduism	15.0%	0.6%	-14.4%
Buddhism	7.1%	1.2%	-5.9%
Judaism	0.2%	1.8%	+1.6%
Unaffiliated	16.3%	16.4%	+0.1%

PewResearch Religion & Public Life Project

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE SURVEY

Percentage of U.S. adults who are affiliated with:

Evangelical Protestant Tradition



Percentage of Each State's Population that affiliates with Evangelical Protestant Tradition



Note: Eight traditions (Buddhist, Hindu, Jehovah's Witness, Muslim, Orthodox, Other Christian, Other Faiths and Other World Religions) constitute 5% or less of the population in nearly every state. In these cases, the map will show little or no variation.

Religious composition of:

United States

Religious Tradition

Reset

Evangelical Protestant Tradition	26%
Mainline Protestant Tradition	18%
Historically Black Protestant Tradition	7%
Catholic Tradition	24%
Mormon Tradition	2%
Orthodox Tradition	1%
Jehovah's Witness Tradition	1%
Other Christian Traditions	< 0.5%
Jewish Tradition	2%
Muslim Tradition	1%
Buddhist Tradition	1%
Hindu Tradition	< 0.5%
Other World Religions	< 0.5%
Other Faiths	1%
Unaffiliated	16%
Don't know/ refused	< 0.5%

National: ± 0.6% margin of error, 35,556 cases

**Recognizing the fact of religious diversity
demands that we prepare students to
navigate diverse religious contexts.**

The *New York Times* Bestseller

STEPHEN PROTHERO



RELIGIOUS
LITERACY

WHAT EVERY AMERICAN NEEDS TO KNOW
—AND DOESN'T

"Provocative and timely . . . combines a lively history of the rise and fall of American religious literacy with a set of proposed remedies."

—*Washington Post*



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**Religion Dominates Issues in
the Public Sphere...**

Separation of Church and state

Gay Marriage

War

Women's Rights

Abortion

Immigration

Climate Change

Death penalty

Environmentalism

Animal Testing

Poverty

Sex Education

Freedom of Expression

Euthanasia

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Drug Legalization

Access to Health Care

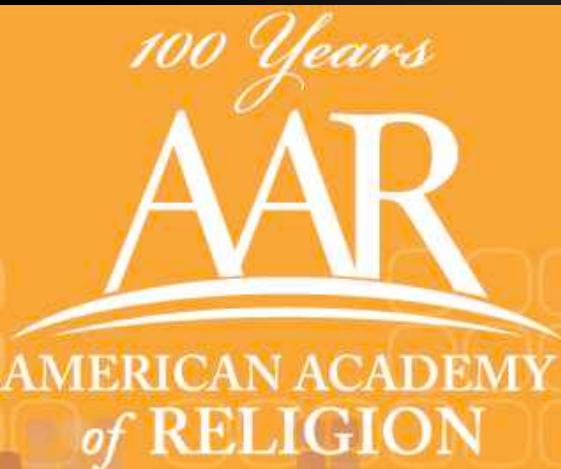
**BUT, Religious Ignorance
Dominates The Public
Conversation**

Atheists and Agnostics, Mormons and Jews Score Best on Religious Knowledge Survey

Average # of questions answered correctly out of 32

Total	16.0
Atheist/Agnostic	20.9
Jewish	20.5
Mormon	20.3
White evangelical Protestant	17.6
White Catholic	16.0
White mainline Protestant	15.8
Nothing in particular	15.2
Black Protestant	13.4
Hispanic Catholic	11.6

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S
FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE May 19-June 6, 2010



Guidelines

for Teaching About Religion

in K-12 Public Schools in the United States

Because 1) the study of religion is already present in public schools, 2) there are no content and skill guidelines for educators about religion itself that are constructed by religious studies scholars, and 3) educators and school boards are often confused about how to teach about religion in constitutionally sound and intellectually responsible ways, the American Academy of Religion (the world's largest association of religion scholars) has published these Guidelines as a resource for educators and interested citizens.

Three premises inform this project: illiteracy regarding religion 1) is widespread, 2) fuels prejudice and antagonism, and 3) can be diminished by teaching about religion in public schools using a non-devotional, academic perspective, called religious studies.

Part 2: What we should teach, and how

**We should include teaching about religion
in the middle school curriculum.**

All 50 states include religion in the curriculum standards in some way.

Teaching

About

Religion

IN NATIONAL AND STATE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Prepared by

Susan L. Douglass, Council on Islamic Education
in collaboration with the First Amendment Center

Example from my home state...

Content Standard 4: The student will analyze the world's peoples and cultures in the context of the human systems in the Eastern Hemisphere.

1. Compare and contrast the common cultural traits including language, ethnic heritage, social systems, religions, and traditions and how cultural diffusion impacts societies.
2. Describe the world's major religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism including the geographic origins, major beliefs, and customs of the six major world religions and the significance of religion in contemporary societies.

Good Starting Point, But...

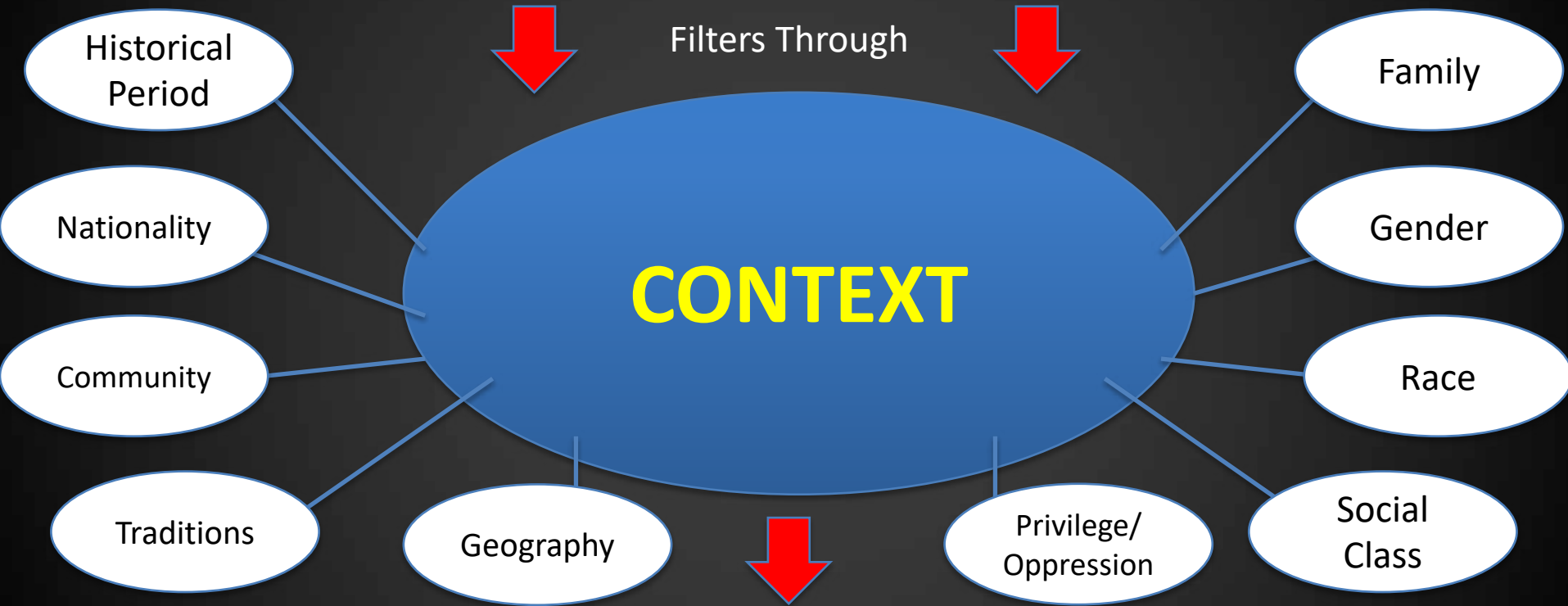
- Too often, Religion is given cursory treatment
- Treated as part of ancient history
- Treats religions as monolithic

OK, it's a no-brainer to include Academic Study of World Religions in the curriculum. But what, specifically, should we teach about religion?

Lived Religion Model

RELIGIOUS TRADITION: "Basic Facts"

Origins, History, Geography, Beliefs,
Practices, Texts, Statistics, Sects



INDIVIDUAL'S LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THIS TRADITION

Contextualized again by relating to other followers, local
faith communities, groups, denominations, or sects

Simplifying the Complex

- All religions are internally diverse
- Lived out in individual contexts
- We must teach this directly as part of an introduction to world religions.

**This is one of the main ways that we
may either REINFORCE or DEBUNK
dehumanizing stereotypes about
Religions.**

Simple way to show internal diversity of religions

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_schools_and_branches

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_denominations

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_religious_movements

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schools_of_Buddhism

These are all Christian practices:



<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2012-06-03/snake-handlers-pentecostal-tennessee/55354206/1>

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2014/06/20/pope-on-corpus-christi-jesus-in-the-eucharist-gives-life-love/>

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bb/Carnival_in_Rio_de_Janeiro.jpg

Planning Site Visits

My first impression of Tulsa's Religious Landscape...



Digging Deeper...



<http://www.istulsa.org>

<http://www.tambao.org/visit.html>

http://www.htgt.org/htgtweb/htgt_temple_direction.htm

http://www.tulsagogue.com/files/b_nai_emunah_sanctuary__southeast_view.jpg



<http://www.dioceseoftulsa.org/index.cfm?load=org&org=1>

Suggestion- split over 2 days

Monday, Feb. 9:

Short first period at school – load buses at 8:35/leave by 8:45

Time	T/E	R/K
8:45-9:45	West End Synagogue	Sri <u>Ganesha</u> Temple
10:15-11:15	Sri <u>Ganesha</u> Temple	West End Synagogue

Tuesday, Feb. 10

Time	T/E	R/K
8:15-9:15	Nashville Islamic Center	Church of Christ the King
9:30-10:30	Church of Christ the King	<u>Padmasambhava</u> Buddhist Center
10:45-11:45	<u>Padmasambhava</u> Buddhist Center	Nashville Islamic Center

Site Visits as Mini-Ethnography

FIELD TRIP NOTES:

Your job is to record sensory information (sights, sounds, smells) you take in at each place we visit. Additionally, you should write down any important information you learn from our hosts. Focus on recording observable facts and avoid inserting opinions.

**Visiting each site as a respectful “Participant-Observer,”
Not a devotee or tourist.**

Expanding your footprint through Flipped Learning



Islam



February 2013



Personal Connections: Religious Autobiography

Religious Autobiography 30 points completion grade

Write a 1-2 page (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font) autobiographical reflection of how religion has affected your life. Include in your autobiography:

- Your connection to an organized religion, if any
- How you or your family observes this religion or why you or your family choose not to be observant/religious
- How your identity has been shaped by religion or the choice not to be religious
- Experiences in your life that connect to religion in some way
- Your ideas of what a religion is and why human beings are religious
- Any insights you gained from your interview with a parent (see back of this page).

Your autobiography is due at the start of class on Thursday, January 10.

Pre-Writing—Ideas to include in autobiography:

Connect with students of diverse faith traditions around the world



Face to Faith

Tony Blair
Faith Foundation



Welcome to the Face to Faith Online Learning Community.

The Online Learning Community is a resource for those teaching the Face to Faith programme.

What is Face to Faith?

Face to Faith works across the world delivering a pioneering education programme to help prevent religious conflict and extremism. We help students embrace an open-minded approach to others, to diversity and to difference that can lead to tolerant stable societies.

You can find out more about the programme [here](#).



News

Stand Up for the Freedom of Religion

Wed, 05/11/2014 - 3:48pm



Stand Up for the Freedom of Religion and Bel

[Read more »](#)

Friend of a Different Faith Blogging

Wed, 23/07/2014 - 4:03pm



We are proud to announce the winners of "My Friend of a Different Faith" blogging competition 2014.

Sign Up to Teach Face to Faith

Face to Faith is free to all schools. If you are interested in teaching Face to Faith sign up to become one of our teachers.

[Sign up to teach the programme here.](#)

Face to Faith in the United States

Face to Faith's use in American public schools provides an example of how it can be used and adapted for a wide range of contexts.

[Find out more about our work in the United States.](#)

www.facetofaithonline.org

RavelUnravel: Cool Resource!

<http://ravelunravel.com>

Summary of What We Should Teach

- Start with Basic Facts
- Internal Diversity of Religions
- Lived Realities of Real Human Beings

HUMANIZING DIFFERENCE

Part 3: Troubleshooting

Constitutional issues

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

School Dist. of Abington Tp. v. Schempp, 374 U.S. 203 (1963)

School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp

No. 142

Argued February 27-28, 1963

Decided June 17, 1963*

374 U.S. 203

Syllabus

Because of the prohibition of the First Amendment against the enactment by Congress of any law "respecting an establishment of religion," which is made applicable to the States by the Fourteenth Amendment, no state law or school board may require that passages from the Bible be read or that the Lord's Prayer be recited in the public schools of a State at the beginning of each school day -- even if individual students may be excused from attending or participating in such exercises upon written request of their parents. Pp. 374 U. S. 205-227.

Teaching
OF
Religion

(Focus on Religious
Formation)



Teaching
ABOUT
Religion

(Focus on Religious
Awareness)

We should cultivate a culture of the **ACADEMIC STUDY** of religion in our classrooms, i.e. Teaching **ABOUT** religion.

FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER

SPEECH • PRESS • RELIGION • ASSEMBLY • PETITION

AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY AND THE NEWSEUM



FINDING COMMON GROUND

A FIRST AMENDMENT
GUIDE TO RELIGION
AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WRITTEN AND EDITED BY
CHARLES C. HAYNES
AND
OLIVER THOMAS

FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Charles C. Haynes, Ph.D.

Dr. Charles C. Haynes is senior scholar at the First Amendment Center. He writes and speaks extensively on religious liberty and religion in American public life.

He is best known for his work on First Amendment issues in public schools. Over the past two decades, Haynes has been the principal organizer and drafter of consensus guidelines on religious liberty in schools endorsed by a broad range of religious and educational organizations. In January 2000, three of these guides were distributed by the U.S. Department of Education to every public school in the nation.

Haynes is the author or co-author of six books, including *Firm Freedoms: A Documentary History of First Amendment Rights in America* (2006) and *Religion in American Public Life* (2001). His column, *Inside the First Amendment*, appears in newspapers nationwide.

He is a founding board member of the Character Education Partnership and serves on the Steering Committee of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and the American Bar Association Advisory Commission on Public Education. He chairs the Committee on Religious Liberty of the National Council of Churches.

Widely quoted in news magazines and major newspapers, Haynes is also a frequent guest on television and radio. He has been profiled in *The Wall Street Journal* and on ABC's "Evening News."

Haynes holds a master's degree from Harvard Divinity School and a doctorate from Emory University.

Oliver Thomas, Esq.

Oliver Thomas is a lawyer, minister, author and former school board chairman. He has written and lectured extensively on the subject of religion and public education and has consulted with hundreds of school districts. He currently directs the Niswonger Foundation in Greeneville, Tenn.

Mr. Thomas has been involved in litigation at every level of state and federal courts including the United States Supreme Court. His clients have included the National Council of Churches and the Baptist Joint Committee.





Guidelines

for Teaching About Religion

in K-12 Public Schools in the United States

There are important differences between this approach and a faith-based approach to teaching and learning about religion. These Guidelines support the former, constitutionally sound approach for teaching about religion in public schools—encouraging student *awareness* of religions, but *not acceptance* of a particular religion; *studying* about religion, but *not practicing* religion; *exposing* students to a diversity of religious views, but *not imposing* any particular view; and *educating* students about all religions, but *not promoting or denigrating* religion.¹

Make Clear In Communication to Students and Parents...

- Learning about religion, not how to become an adherent of a particular faith
- Norm for academic discussion of religion:
No proselytizing allowed
- Remind parents and students that this is a
BASIC CIVIC COMPETENCY for today's world

Spokespeople and Experts

Avoiding Experts and Spokespeople

- Norm the discussion by requiring first person singular “I” language so students do not claim to represent anyone other than themselves.
- Avoid putting religious minorities on the spot to speak for their tradition.

I'm among the "Religiously Ignorant" people you talked about earlier. Where do I start?

Lean On Great Resources

Humanizing Difference
NCSS Boston, November 2014
Tommy Sharp, Holland Hall School, Tulsa, OK

Contact Me:

Email: tsharp@hollandhall.org

Phone/Text: 615-430-7697

Twitter: [@tmcgsharp](https://twitter.com/tmcgsharp)

Recommended Resources for Teaching World Religions in Middle School (Including all books/web resources used in presentation)

Resources for Educators:

General World Religions Content:

Esposito, John L., and Susan Tyler Hitchcock. *Geography of Religion: Where God Lives, Where Pilgrims Walk*. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006.

Esposito, John L., et al. *World Religions Today*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Fisher, Mary Pat. *Living Religions*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010.

Kimball, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Evil*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

Paden, William E. *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Smith, Huston. *The Illustrated World's Religions*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University: <http://pluralism.org>

Professional Development

Religious Worlds of New York

Teaching the Everyday Life of American Religious Diversity

The *Religious Worlds of New York* summer institute is sponsored by:



UNION

NEH Summer Institute – expected to be offered again in Summer 2016

**Don't you get backlash from
some parents?**

I don't want my child to be
wrongly influenced

They're too young

YES

It's part of our faith to
Share faith with others

Those people are
terrorists

Like Any Potentially Controversial
Topic,

Communication
Is Key!

A Success Story

Alternate Essay Prompt for Student Who Missed Field Trips

What have you learned in this unit? What do you hope to remember when you are an adult?

I have learned about religions all over the world and each one is different from another whether by a little or a lot.

Such as Hinduism being a polytheistic religion and how it wants you

to be good and you will be better later. And Islam is a lot like

Christianity which is a lot like

Judaism and they all want us to follow God and his rules.

But Buddists are deep and to teach religion but teach life lessons

that stick to one's entire life and

the other goal is to become a

monk and teach others how to become

enlightened and then come back to

teach others. But these are lessons
that the diversity of everyone,
and they are special in
their way of purpose. When I
grew up I don't want
to forget that everyone isn't
judged by their religion I used to
think that all Islamics were
psychopaths with lethal weapons
and a disorganized religion.
But when it comes to religion
I am not going to listen to my
mom when it comes to other religions

Questions

**Thank you for attending!
Visit the “Resource Table!”**

Contact Me:

tsharp@hollandhall.org

Twitter: [@tmcgsharp](https://twitter.com/tmcgsharp)